

One Sweet Blend

Choosing the right blender for a natural foods manufacturer.

Twenty-nine years ago, a beekeeper in Eugene, Oregon, posted a road sign that declared, “Honey for Sale.” A year later he found himself heading up a family business that sold beekeeping supplies, packaged bees and honey to local customers. Based on the notion that natural foods are essential for a healthy and happy lifestyle, beekeeper-turned-CEO Richard Turanski soon incorporated GloryBee Foods and began manufacturing and distributing a large number of honey-related products. Seeking even more product diversity, in 1983, he added the Aunt Patty’s line of non-honey-related sweeteners, natural oils, herbs, and spices.

Since then, the company’s markets and supply network have expanded dramatically. Today Turanski personally scouts world markets for organically grown ingredients to supply his family’s multimillion-dollar, natural foods business. GloryBee Foods is now the leading manufacturer and distributor of organically grown and natural food products in the Pacific Northwest. And although competition is tough in a market where sales of “100 percent certified organic” products are growing more than 20 percent annually, GloryBee is growing even faster. The company delivers its products to natural food stores, bakeries, and food manufacturers from southern Oregon to the Canadian border.

“Although we still process an average of 13,000 pounds of honey daily, honey products are now less than 25 percent of our business,” explains Alan Turanski, the second-generation Director of Marketing for GloryBee Foods. “Today the bulk of our sales come from other

kinds of sweeteners, blended spices, and trail mixes.”

Last year the company management team decided that in order to continue providing high-quality natural and organic foods at reasonable prices, all blending processes would have to be brought in-house. That’s when Chief Engineer Jim Davis began his search for a ribbon blender that could mix delicate ingredients in an efficient, cost-effective, and sanitary manner.

Business-critical blending

“The choice of a blender was especially critical for GloryBee Foods,” recalls Davis. “Bringing the blending process in-house was key to making us more competitive and opening new opportunities. We intended to cut costs and to pass those savings on to our customers.”

Meeting this challenge meant that Davis had to find a machine that could blend spices in one run and changeover quickly to blend delicate trail mix ingredients in the next — without crushing dried fruits or



chipping nuts and seeds. It had to be sanitary, easy to clean, virtually maintenance-free and reasonably priced.

“We started out with one manufacturer that offered us a blender at a great price. It looked good until we began to focus on specifics — like the drive system,” says Davis. “That chain drive requires oil and has to be shrouded to prevent food contamination. It’s cumbersome and worse, it’s a maintenance nightmare.” Searching for another answer, he contacted Charles Ross & Son Company.

Side-by-side comparison

Experts recommend that companies planning to purchase a blender should first conduct a thorough survey of all blenders that could potentially meet production needs. Once the field is narrowed, a side-by-side comparison is the best way to choose between the final contenders. Frequently, such focused comparisons reveal important differences that can lead to dramatic long-term savings or improvements in end-product quality.

Davis remembers the revelation that took place at GloryBee when they conducted a side-by-side comparison of the two blenders under consideration.

“The closer we looked, the more contrast we saw.

Instead of an old-fashioned chain drive, the Ross blender uses a much more advanced drive. The motor is linked directly into a right-angle, hollow-bore reducer. Because it’s a one-piece unit, it doesn’t need lubrication. On top of that, it’s practically maintenance-free.” The higher quality drive enables the blender to deliver superior performance and reliability with 95 percent efficiency and high torque.

Davis and other decision-makers at GloryBee recognized the long-term benefits of a blender with heavy-duty construction and components engineered for a long service life. Radiused interior corners, meticulously smoothed internal welds, and 150-grit internal polish make the blender easy to clean. Type 316 stainless steel ensures that it can stand up to chemical attack from salts and acid-based ingredients.

Adding more spice to the analysis, the Ross blender offers GloryBee Foods the ability to customize its blending operations with an electronic variable speed control and interchangeable ribbon/paddle agitators. With a digital control pad and electronic variable speed control, operators can easily adjust the speed of the blender (while maintaining constant torque) and tune the machine to reach the greatest possible efficiency for each prod-

Electronic variable speed control— An on/off switch is not enough anymore!

In today's economy, every piece of processing equipment must perform more efficiently than ever before in order to turn out high-quality products at a competitive price. The electronic variable speed control enables GloryBee Foods to regulate the blending speed and optimize processing flexibility — all with a single piece of equipment.

According to Rob Lanham, General Manager of Ross Systems and Controls, a variable speed control offers a number of important advantages over the old-fashioned on/off switch:

- Maintains constant torque over the entire speed range.
- Range of 8 – 40 rpm. The control allows the operator to select speeds over a wide range, using a standard non-inverter-duty motor.
- Soft start, built-in starter, and variable speed control, all in one unit. The variable speed control eliminates the need and the cost for a separate starter and soft-start package.
- Load and voltage feedback. Built-in, adjustable overload and voltage thresholds protect against phase failure and under-voltage.
- Easy operation with a front-mounted digital keypad. Using the keypad, the operator can quickly enter the desired blender speed for each recipe.
 - Jog button.
 - Safety/emergency shutdown
 - Single-axis control with variable speed.

“As recipes become more complex and business continues to grow,” says Lanham, “GloryBee Foods may eventually choose to upgrade to a programmable speed control. With that inexpensive upgrade, operators would simply choose a recipe, and the control system would automatically regulate the speed and duration of each blending step. In fact, the entire blending operation could be automated easily – automatically charging the blender with ingredients in the exact amounts and sequence required, and managing the blending process from start to finish.”

uct. Slow paddle blending, for example, is easiest on delicate trail mix ingredients. The ribbon agitator, running at a faster speed, is preferable for custom-blending more hardy spices like cinnamon, cloves, and ginger.

“Using the same blender, we can process everything from nutmeg to dried bananas by simply controlling the speed and changing agitators,” adds Alan Turanski. “We became convinced that the Ross ribbon blender could do our job equally well or better than any other blender on the market. And their price just slam-dunked the deal.”

Beyond the product engineering and pricing, the folks at GloryBee Foods felt especially comfortable working with Ross. Like GloryBee Foods, Ross is also a family-run business.

“Ross is a company a lot like ours,” says Turanski.

Business is booming

More and more people are insisting on quality and nutritional value in the foods they put on their family tables. Industry analysts report that more than 54 percent of Americans have tried organic foods, and nearly 30 percent are consuming more organic foods



Raw materials are charged on the overhead mezzanine. A balanced ribbon design provides vigorous lateral and axial movement of the bulk material, then promotes fast center discharge.



The elevated sanitary Ribbon Blender installed in the GloryBee facility is positioned to discharge directly into an auger filling/dispensing system below. The panel at right provides both start/stop functionality as well as variable speed control.

and beverages than they did one year ago. GloryBee Foods is perfectly positioned to satisfy the soaring demand for high quality, natural and organically grown food products.

“Our organic foods business is still unfolding,” says Turanski. “Now we’re in a position to really go for it, because we can be more responsive to our customers than our bigger competitors can. We do custom blends more quickly. Our turnaround times are faster, and we welcome smaller orders, too. Our flexibility, combined with the consistency and overall quality we’re now able to achieve, is a tremendous competitive advantage.”

Increased profitability

“We have cut combined costs (labor, freight, and time) by more than 20 percent since the Ross blender was installed,” says Turanski. “Now we can produce blended spices and trail mixes more profitably because we do all our own blending in-house.” He explains that GloryBee Foods used to bring all the ingredients into the warehouse, ship them out for blending, and then return the blended ingredients to the warehouse for packaging. Those days are over.

“Today we’re shipping fresh, organically grown ingredients from around the world directly to our warehouse for in-house blending,” says Turanski. “GloryBee Foods is now blending high quality food products for its customers, while helping to support a global network of organic farmers – importing pumpkin seeds, millet, pine nuts, and sunflower seeds

from China; cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and ginger from Indonesia’s Jakarta and Bali; apricots, lentils, figs, chick peas, and olive oil from Turkey; and sesame seeds and cold-pressed safflower oil from Mexico.”

Versatility to develop new products

“The versatility of this blender has opened a lot of doors for us,” says Turanski. GloryBee’s family of blender-produced products has grown to include custom spices, several new kinds of trail mixes, seasoning salts, and a variety of leafy Italian seasoning blends.

According to Turanski, “Our blending program is stronger than ever because we can be more accurate in the way we combine our ingredient list. And in creating the herb blend, we can run the blender at a slower setting to avoid breaking up the leaves.”

GloryBee Foods, in an effort to boost ROI even further, has decided to provide contract blending services to other food manufacturers. The company offers a “complete service of custom spice and dry ingredient blending for any size job.” And because it is now a direct importer of spices and other dry ingredients, GloryBee is also ready to provide other manufacturers pure and blended ingredients — all at a competitive price.

For more information, contact Charles Ross and Son Company at 800-243-ROSS or email sales@mixers.com

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